

# BSNL ‘sinking deep’ in crisis amid user churn to Jio, Airtel, delay in 4G gear supply: Employees union.

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Ashutosh Kumar , • ETTelecom Updated On Feb 16, 2024 at 01:45 PM IST:



NEW DELHI: The migration of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) users to private sector rivals Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel and a delay in 4G equipment supply from Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) for the rollout of telecom operator's 4G services is compounding troubles for the company, an employee union said Friday.

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BSNL Employees Union (BSNLEU) said.

BSNLEU General Secretary P Abhimanyu, in a letter to Neeraj Mittal, Secretary, Department of Telecommunications, and PK Purwar, CMD, BSNL, said the telecom operator is “sinking deep into the crisis” due to the denial of timely launch of 4G and 5G services.

“According to the data being released by TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India), tens of lakhs of customers are deserting BSNL every month and are migrating to Jio and Airtel. Denial of permission for the upgradation of the 4G compatible BTSs (base transceiver stations) of BSNL and also denial of level-playing ground to BSNL vis-a-vis the private telecom companies, in the matter of procuring mobile network equipments, have costed BSNL dearly,” Abhimanyu said in the letter.

ETTelecom has reviewed a copy of the letter dated January 31, 2024.

The wireless broadband user base of BSNL declined to 20.85 million in November from 21.35 million in October, according to the sector regulator’s latest data. Airtel added the maximum number of 4G/5G subscribers in November with 3.98 million users joining its network, followed by Reliance Jio with 3.45 million, taking their wireless base to 255.07 million and 455.82 million, respectively.

The employees' union has urgently sought the intervention of the Central government to help BSNL launch its 4G and 5G services without further delay.

Even as BSNL struggles with its fourth-generation network rollout, its private sector rivals Jio and Airtel have expanded 5G network coverage nearly across the entire country. Third-largest telecom carrier, Vodafone Idea, is yet to commercially launch its 5G wireless network.

The employees' union said while Jio and Airtel are procuring their 4G and 5G equipment from multinationals such as Nokia, Ericsson, and Samsung, BSNL has been directed to procure its equipment only from Indian manufacturers in line with the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) policy, alleging that the government "very well knows that no Indian telecom equipment manufacture is having proven 4G technology".

BSNLEU said the telco could have launched its 4G services at least 3.5 years ago had the government allowed it to upgrade existing 49,300 3G BTSs to 4G BTSs.

The telecom PSU last year awarded an advanced purchase order (APO) of about Rs 19,000 crore to Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and ITI Limited for the deployment of its 4G network covering 1 lakh sites.

Mumbai-based TCS-led consortium includes public sector firm Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT) and Tejas Networks, acquired by Tata Sons.

Arnob Roy, Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Whole-Time Director at Tejas Networks had said that the gear maker has ramped up shipments of 4G Radio Access Network (RAN) to BSNL and "several several thousand systems have been shipped which are a combination of single and dualband radios in Band 1 and Band 28".

Separately, BSNLEU in a statement on Thursday (February 15) said that BSNL should be allowed to utilise the network of Vi for offering 4G services, and wrote to the government to take immediate action on the matter.

Reportedly, Purwar told BSNL employees that pan-India 4G services would be launched in October 2024, but in a recent meeting, he said the fourth-generation services would be launched in December 2024.